INTERVIEW:
COL. WILLIAM E. TAYLOR, USMC, PROGRAM EXECUTIVE OFFICER FOR LAND SYSTEMS

By Glenn W. Goodman Jr.

ol. Bill Taylor sat down for an interview prior to his retirement from active duty at the end of August 2008 after serving 20 months as the Marine Corps' first Program Executive Officer (PEO), with responsibility for overseeing a group of major system acquisition programs. His PEO Land Systems portfolio included eight key programs, described in detail in this publication: the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle, Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, Ground/Air Task-Oriented Radar, Lightweight 155mm Howitzer, Medium Tactical Vehicle Replacement, Marine Personnel Carrier, Logistics Vehicle System Replacement, and Common Aviation Command and Control System. An operational CH-46 helicopter pilot with nearly 5,000 flying hours, Taylor was bitten by the acquisition bug after 15 years of service, obtained a master's degree in defense systems acquisition management at the Naval Postgraduate School in 1994-1996, and never looked back. He became the H-46 program manager three years later. In 2002-2003, Taylor served as the Marine military assistant to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development & Acquisition and subsequently became the deputy program manager for the V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft development program in late 2003 and its joint program manager in 2005.

What brought about the creation of the PEO for Land Systems?

During John Young's tenure as assistant secretary of the Navy for Research, Development & Acquisition [ASN (RDA)] and the naval services' acquisition executive, he questioned why the Marine Corps did not have any acquisition PEOs like the Navy, Air Force, and Army. After he left to become director of Defense Research and Engineering in 2005, his replacement, Dr. Delores Etter, picked up that issue and began pressing the Marine Corps to establish a PEO to bring dedicated executive program management to bear on the service's increasingly complex land system acquisition programs. Gen. Robert Magnus became the assistant commandant in September 2005, and through his and Dr. Etter's efforts, the first Marine Corps PEO became a reality. Gen. Magnus chaired a meeting of the Marine Corps Requirements Oversight Council [MROC] on Aug. 15, 2006, which formalized the need for, and made the decision to establish, the Marine Corps' first PEO. I was selected for the position in November and was on board in this office two months later.

Taylor receives an orientation at the Oshkosh Corp., Oshkosh, Wis., during a September 2007 visit, as PEO LS Chief of Staff Tim Ferris looks on.

Could you elaborate on the need for a Marine Corps PEO?

Before the MROC decision, all of the Marine Corps' major acquisition programs were either managed by Marine Corps Systems Command or by other services' PEOs, or reported directly to a service acquisition executive. It was all driven by statutes. For instance, an ACAT [acquisition category] I program can't report to a systems command and has to report either to a PEO or to an acquisition executive. Acquisition executives provide executive oversight and typically don't wish to be involved in the day-to-day management of programs. Marine aviation acquisition programs are managed by Navy aircraft PEOs, but the Marine Corps did not have a PEO for its major ground programs, so the management structure for its acquisition programs was unwieldy.

There also was a growing recognition that the Marine Corps is slowly but steadily moving away from simple procurements to satisfy its requirements to genuinely developing some of its own unique capabilities. At the same time, its land

PEO Land Systems staff shortly after stand-up of the organization.

systems are becoming more expensive and more complex. So there was a clear need to establish the PEO, particularly to strengthen efforts to field new systems faster and more efficiently.

The Marine Corps also was created a primary Military Occupational Specialty [MOS] for acquisition, which in the past was a secondary MOS. For example, I was formerly an aviator who took on acquisition as a secondary occupational specialty. Now we are grooming Marines to have acquisition as their primary responsibility. So it works hand in glove.

How were the eight acquisition programs within the PEO's portfolio selected?

Brig. Gen. Michael Brogan, the head of Marine Corps Systems Command, and I made recommendations, but ultimately it was Dr. Etter who assigned the portfolio of programs to me. Her criterion for selection was quite simple: If it's an ACAT I or ACAT II program, the PEO gets it. The eight ground system programs spanned the entire spectrum of acquisition phases. For example, the Medium Tactical Vehicle Replacement program was already well into full production, while the Marine Personnel Carrier was in the pre-Milestone A phase [requirements generation prior to approval to enter concept definition]. And the portfolio included two C4I [command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence] programs – the Ground/Air Task-Oriented Radar and the Common Aviation Command and Control System. So they ranged from development through sustainment.

If you look at the Navy's PEOs and those of the Army and Air Force, you'll see that they have a more logical collection of programs under the PEO

aligned by domain. We didn't have the luxury to do that yet, because we have only one PEO. But I can see a point in time where there will be a need for a second and maybe a third Marine Corps PEO, which would allow us to align our acquisition programs under more logical domains.

What were the initial challenges you faced in standing up the PEO?

I began with no staff, no infrastructure, and no operating budget, so it was a little overwhelming. And my very first meeting involved sitting in on the briefing to the secretary of the Navy about the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle [EFV] program's cost breach and required recertification under the Nunn-McCurdy Act. So that was my introduction to the job as PEO.

The EFV, my most critical acquisition program, survived the Nunn-McCurdy process and was re-certified. It's well on its way to recovery and appears to be in great shape right now. But in early 2007, I had to immediately focus on helping to provide oversight of the assigned programs such as the troubled EFV, while at the same time, going about the business of actually standing up a totally new organization from scratch.

One of my primary focuses when I first stood up the PEO was to take care of the administrative side – to lay out the PEO's authority, organizational

Defense [DoD] PEOs and acquisition organizations to draw on to help support my program managers. We put into place robust, formalized, disciplined, standardized operating processes and procedures that have been proven throughout the rest of DoD. That's one of our accomplishments of which I am most proud.

Can you give us some examples of those processes?

A key mechanism is conducting quarterly program reviews, where you assess a program according to standardized criteria and metrics, and provide transparency by inviting representatives of all the various organizational stakeholders to attend. If there's one thing of which I'm absolutely certain, it's that sometimes program managers feel alone and afraid, and every time they run into an obstacle or a risk area, they feel that it is a new and unique problem. I guarantee you that somewhere in DoD some other program manager has experienced the very same problem before and somehow found a solution. One of the big reasons for inviting the stakeholders is that they have a wealth and depth of experience and can help facilitate solutions to problems and risks. Those organizations really want to help, whether the program managers believe it or not.

We also became a center of excellence for a management methodology called the Probability of

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relationships, operating agreements, etc. On Feb. 5, 2007, Dr. Etter signed a memo establishing the PEO. That same day, she also appointed me and signed the PEO charter, which I was closely involved in drafting. On the heels of that, I met with the Systems Command staff and we drafted an operating agreement between our two organizations, which was signed on April 4, 2007. A day later, Dr. Etter signed a memo identifying the programs in my portfolio.

We next set about identifying all the best business practices of all the other Department of

Program Success, or PoPS. This was a process to assess, in a very disciplined fashion, the current state of a program's health and to forecast the probability of success of the program as it moves through the acquisition process. It was developed by the Defense Acquisition University [DAU] and was first embraced by the Department of the Army to a limited extent. Over time, the Air Force also adopted PoPS for management of its programs. But no organization in the Department of the Navy had gone down this route. I made it a priority when I stood up the

PEO to begin instituting the process. My lead business manager was my point man for it and our liaison with DAU. We set up a series of classes for program managers and their staffs over a three- to four-month period and then formally launched the process in early 2008. PoPS became the standard methodology by which we accomplished our quarterly program reviews. Subsequently, the secretary of the Navy, as part of an acquisition reform initiative, made the PoPS methodology the centerpiece of the Department of the Navy's new "gate-review" process, and our PEO became the center of excellence for educating and instituting PoPS across the department in all of its major acquisition programs.

We instituted quarterly logistics reviews, because I have a strong focus on the program manager's sustainment responsibilities after system fielding, and I have a big anxiety about the disconnect on the ground side. I also stole a page out of my Naval Air Systems Command book. They have a process called the IOCSR [Initial Operational Capability Supportability Review], which is used when first introducing a new aircraft to the fleet. The process involves educating the fleet about everything associated with the new aircraft, including its capabilities, maintenance, and sustainment, and gives the fleet a vote as to whether the aircraft is deemed ready for introduction. There had been too many examples of the fleet feeling unhappy with the final product and not sufficiently involved in its introduction. I began instituting the same process here on the Marine Corps Land Systems side as well.

What is the PEO's relationship with Marine Corps Systems Command?

As a PEO, I don't report to the head of Systems Command. My boss is the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development & Acquisition. But that belies our relationship with Systems Command, because the PEO couldn't really exist without its collaboration with Systems Command. We are really what I would call a Systems Command center of excellence for managing larger, more complex programs. The arrival of the PEO actually has enabled Systems Command to devote less time to managing programs and more time to some of its key responsibilities as described in DoD and Navy acquisition instructions.

The primary role of a Systems Command is to manage the acquisition infrastructure, i.e., provide the best services available in terms of engineering, logistics, contracting, legal, and financial support, to allow the PEO and program managers to focus exclusively on program management. That was a cultural shift in that, prior to the stand-up of our PEO, Systems Command also focused on the responsibil-

Taylor behind the wheel of one of his charges, the LVSR.

ity of managing acquisition programs. Systems Command is now focusing on what doctrinally is its No. 1 responsibility – acquisition infrastructure.

In fact, most of my PEO staff are actually aligned under Systems Command through what we call competency alignment. For example, my chief engineer reports administratively to Systems Command – his first-line supervisor is over in the engineering competency at Systems Command – but operationally he is part of my staff. The same is true of my chief logistician, financial manager, etc.

Any final thoughts?

I am pleased that, as I retire from active duty, the PEO for Land Systems position is being converted to a Senior Executive Service [SES] billet equivalent to flag officer rank. If you look across the Department of the Navy, you will see that PEOs typically are one- or two-star flag officers or SES. When the Marine Corps established the PEO for Land Systems, it wanted to stand up the PEO as quickly as possible. It looked across the pool of available general officers and SES personnel, but the number of individuals who were qualified to assume the PEO position was extremely limited and they were earmarked for other positions. Because the Marine Corps leadership didn't want to wait for the perfect solution, it looked at the small pool of qualified colonels and selected me. Converting the PEO position to an SES billet is the right thing to do for the credibility of the job, with the added clout and seniority that comes with the higher rank.